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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 003064

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [NL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/PARIS RIOTS: COULD IT HAPPEN HERE?

REF: A. POLITICS IN THE NETHERLANDS.11/8-9/05

[1](#)B. THE HAGUE 02705

[1](#)C. THE HAGUE 03008

Classified By: CHARGE CHAT BLAKEMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Dutch are concerned that riots similar to those in France are unlikely, but could erupt in the Netherlands given a dramatic trigger event, especially between police and Muslim youth. Embassy contacts emphasized that differences between the French and Dutch immigrant communities and social policies make such unrest relatively unlikely absent provocation. National and local governments are taking measures to reduce the likelihood of French-style riots and to end them quickly should they occur. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The rioting in France has forced Dutch politicians, community leaders, and average citizens to take a hard look at their own society. The Dutch media has presented an extensive debate as to whether such unrest could occur in the Netherlands. Local government officials, police, academics and Muslim community leaders generally downplay the likelihood of violent protests and stress the difference between the French and Dutch situations.

[1](#)3. (C) The Dutch consider the following as major differences between the two countries: there is more contact in the Netherlands between white Dutch and immigrants; immigrant housing conditions in Holland tend to be better and less ghettoized; and the Dutch police are perceived to be more community-minded and less heavy-handed with immigrants. One Dutch-Moroccan youth leader, Ahmed Dadou, who lived in Paris for one year told emboff, Life may be bad for Muslim youth in Amsterdam, but the situation is nothing like the suburbs of Paris. Even kids who live in segregated, so-called bad neighborhoods here have encounters with the rest of society through school or shopping or being on the street.

[1](#)4. (C) Dutch police contacts informed RSO on November 7 that police intelligence units have no indications that youths are planning disturbances in any major Dutch city, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, all considered possible flash points because of their sizable Muslim populations. The Mayor of Rotterdam told Charge on November 7, for example, that he was confident that Rotterdam will remain calm, despite the widely publicized resignation of a right-wing council member this week for making anti-Muslim remarks. As a precaution, the police have increased their presence in minority neighborhoods in large cities and have promised a quick response should violence erupt. Police have also increased dialogue with community groups and are aware that the Muslim community may be very sensitive to police actions perceived to be against Islam. The Neighborhood Fathers, a watch group in Amsterdam, for example has increased its cooperation with local police and guaranteed that no riots would happen in Amsterdam. Amsterdam is paradise compared to Paris, one member of the group told police during a recent neighborhood meeting. Professor Meindert Fennema at University of Amsterdam said on November 8 that, although notorious troublemakers could be provoked to follow the French example and set cars on fire, major riots are unlikely.

[1](#)5. (C) Nearly all of our contacts acknowledged that violent unrest in the Netherlands, while unlikely, was a distinct possibility. Violent clashes did break out between immigrant youth and police in Amsterdam in 1998, and although there were not actual riots after the murder of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, van Gogh's murder did bring some civil unrest in the form of attacks against mosques and churches throughout the country. During a meeting November 7, Jean Tillie, a sociologist from the University of Amsterdam, told emboffs that ten years ago he would have said absolutely no riots would occur here; now he is not so sure. The climate has changed in the Netherlands. Youths are more disillusioned and radicalized that we thought.

[1](#)6. (C) Mohammed Assa of the Street Corner Foundation in Eastern Amsterdam told emboff November 7 that he would not rule out French-style riots: Everyone talks about the riots and many sympathize with what is happening in Paris. Chatrooms catering to immigrant youth have been filled with discussions of the French riots and comparisons -- many negative -- with the situation of Muslim youths in Holland. Dadou noted that the French government has so far been

careful not to emphasize the role of religion among the rioters; if this were to change, he added, Dutch Muslim youth might feel increased solidarity with their French counterparts and could be more inclined to take to the streets in sympathy.

17. (C) Moustapha Baba, a prominent Dutch-Moroccan businessman and community leader in Amsterdam, told emboff November 9 that feelings are tense in the Netherlands and riots could result if there were a trigger event. If the police threw a grenade into a mosque, I think youngsters would explode, said Abdel Bouali a youth worker in the Amsterdam Neighborhood of Osdorp. Such trigger events are difficult to predict. In 1998, for example, long-standing tensions between Moroccan youth and police erupted into violence after a relatively minor altercation between a policeman and a Moroccan boy and his father. Noting that riots were always possible, Amsterdam West police youth coordinator Ton Smakman told emboff November 8 his greatest fear was that, One stupid guy may see on television what is going on in France and decide to do something like that here.

COMMENT

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18. (C) In the past year, the GONL has twice braced for riots that did not occur: once after the murder of Theo van Gogh in November 2004, and once after a white Dutch woman ran over and killed a Moroccan youth attempting to steal her purse in January 2005. In both instances, community leaders and government officials combined calls for restraint with quick action to identify and punish perpetrators of racist violence on both sides. Behind the quick responses, however, was a palpable fear that such incidents could easily spin out of control -- and that Dutch society is ill-prepared to deal with serious unrest among its large and disaffected immigrant youth population. This realization is fueling a growing debate in the media and political circles here on what can be done to make French-style riots not only unlikely, but unthinkable. END COMMENT.

BLAKEMAN